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ABSTRACT

It took 25 years to develop and arrive at a consensus for a standard orthography for the language of the Innu, or Montagnais, who live in Quebec and Labrador. The principal obstacle to standardization came from dialect diversity. An effort at standardizing the spelling system in the 1970s failed because speakers were not ready to let go of the writing system for their particular dialect, and they rejected a system that did not match their pronunciation. Another initiative in the 1980s made clear that speakers were to keep their accent, even when the spelling was standardized. A recognized authority for standardization of the spelling system was formed in the mid-1980s. At workshops attended by teachers and translators from all Innu communities, the orthography was largely standardized, although not all dialect variations were settled. A permanent committee formed in 1990 was charged with making decisions pertaining to standardization of spelling. Another series of workshops in 1997 tackled the problem of verb conjugations, and a consensus was reached on principles and rules for a common writing system. The work of promoting the spelling norm needs to be carried out for the whole population. Targeting young children is important because they have not yet acquired spelling habits and are not attached to any particular tradition. If the teaching of the Innu language were given more room in the school curriculum, the dissemination of the common spelling system could move forward. (Contains 18 references.) (TD)

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ED 462 244

The Process of Spelling Standardization of Innu-aimun (Montagnais)[1]

Anne-Marie Baraby

Among the languages of the world, dead or still alive, few have developed a writing system. In addition, literacy among the general population is relatively recent in human history. In fact, for a very long period, only the elite had access to writing, and being able to write was not seen as necessary for everyone. This situation has changed greatly and, in the twentieth century, literacy pretty well became the norm, at least for large national languages.

What is the case, then, among minority languages with an *oral* tradition but with no written one? Is it absolutely necessary that they align themselves with languages that have a well-established literary tradition? In the case of Aboriginal languages, this debate has arisen, and it still provokes controversy, even after 30 years. Here is what Grenoble and Whaley (1998) say on the topic in a recent book on endangered languages:

> The majority of endangered languages come from oral cultures, where converting the language to a written form poses certain consequences for the continued use of these languages. It is often argued that any change from an oral to a literate society creates major changes in that society.... At the same time, communities with long-standing written traditions may be in a stronger position to hold on to language despite reduced numbers of speakers, and certainly are in a stronger position for revitalizing a language which may in part need to be reconstructed on the basis of written records. (p. 34)

Another author follows the same line of argument:

> An indigenous language with no traditional writing system tends to yield thus to a language which serves as the means of expression to a metropolitan or otherwise aggressive culture which possesses a traditional writing system and a written, as opposed to oral, literary tradition. (Wurm, 1991, p. 7)

I do not intend to revisit this discussion. I would just like to underline the fact that, according to many specialists in minority and endangered languages, unwritten languages are at a higher risk of disappearing in the mid to long term than those that have developed a standard spelling system. In the current context of modern technological society, therefore, because of the fear that 50 to 90% of the world's languages face extinction in the next century, the development and mastery of writing can play a crucial role for Aboriginal languages (Krauss, 1992).

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The question of spelling standardization, for an oral tradition community interested in writing, is a sensitive topic that arouses a great deal of emotion, as Leanne Hinton, speaking of the Aboriginal languages of California, points out:

> Choosing a writing system has been controversial for many Native communities, leading to high emotions and intense disagreements. Like language itself, a writing system becomes a symbolic representation of a community and its values. But it cannot be forgotten that the heart and soul of California languages are in their speaking. Writing is at best a crude imitation. (Hinton, 1994, p. 219)

The difficulty of adopting a standard spelling is much greater for minority languages that have many dialects. In a democratic society, there is no longer a possibility of imposing one of the dialects as a standard, either spoken or written, as was often done in the past. Instead, a consensus must be reached among all speakers involved. For Aboriginal languages elsewhere, experience shows that an imposed standard has little chance of success.

The Innu

In this paper, I will outline the experience of orthographic standardization by the Innu (also called Montagnais). This history of the development of a standard writing system for a minority linguistic community with an oral tradition is most likely representative of many situations encountered elsewhere by other Aboriginal communities and nations. The process of standardizing the Innu orthography has been long and arduous, taking 25 years to arrive at a consensus satisfactory to all the communities. An officially recognized common spelling system for the Innu language has existed since 1997.

For the Innu, the principal obstacle to standardization came from dialectal diversity; this language has two main dialects and some sub-dialects, which presented morphological differences as much as phonological and lexical ones. As I mentioned above, there was no possibility for the speakers to adopt one of the dialects as a spelling norm.

Linguistic, Geographic, and Demographic Situation

Innu is an Amerindian language of the Algonquian family that is linguistically very close to the (East) Cree of Quebec and the Naskapi. The Innu live in a remote region in ten isolated villages spread out over the immense territory of Quebec and Labrador (Figure 1). Around 8,000 people use Innu as a mother tongue and an everyday language. The rate of retention of the language varies from one community to the next: extinct in one, spoken by one third of the population in another, majority language of nearly 75% at Uashat-Maliotenam, and 95% elsewhere. The Innu language, therefore, is still vital in the majority of communities. Nevertheless, pressures from the dominant language are very strong. In fact, virtually all Innu are bilingual today, with French as the second language in the nine Quebec communities and English in the Labrador community and partly in the Pakuat-shipu community.

Figure 1. Innu Communities

I will now outline the history of the development of writing for the Innu language.

Early Writing in Innu

In an article about the development of writing for the Innu language, Drapeau (1985b) shows that literacy among the Innu can be traced back to the arrival of French missionaries in the eighteenth century. With the aim of learning the language of the people whom they wished to convert, the missionaries developed a writing system, a quasi-phonetic transcription using the roman alphabet (Drapeau, 1985b, p. 96). Using that system, they produced dictionaries, grammars, and religious texts. We will see that this first writing system for Innu influenced the modern spelling of the language. In fact, many of the graphemes found in the works produced by the missionaries have been retained in the present-day writing system. For example, the letter *w* is not included in the Innu alphabet today because it did not exist in French and was, therefore, not used by the missionaries. From the beginning of the process of spelling standardization, the Innu vigorously rejected the use of the *w*, which is widely used in related languages.

We know that, in the nineteenth century, the Innu who were in contact with missionaries "had developed, in the matter of writing, habits which were well-anchored and a tradition of transmission of reading or writing skills" (Drapeau, 1985b, p. 96; our translation). Thus, Father Arnaud, who worked with the Innu for 50 years, declared in letters written in 1869 and 1871 that almost all the "Montagnais know how to read and write" and that "one will not find a family where no one knows how to read and write" (Arnaud, 1869, cited in Drapeau, 1985b, p. 96; our translation). The teaching of literacy was carried out within the family, with the primary aim of reading religious texts; some individuals used writing only for short messages or for a personal journal, but no one used writing intensively. With the introduction of obligatory education in the dominant language, people ceased, little by little, to write in Innu.

The practical orthographies that we are speaking of showed a great deal of variation, changing according to generation, dialect, and even individual and family. As Drapeau (1985b) points out, they followed the rules of oral language more than those of written language. No one, the missionaries no more so than the Innu writers, felt compelled to make the writing system systematic or to use a common spelling system.

First Efforts to Standardize Innu Orthography

In the 1950s, schooling became obligatory for the Innu—in French for the Quebec communities and in English for the one in Labrador. Not surprisingly, the mother tongue did not find a place in educational programs, even when it was not banned outright (as in the case of those who attended residential schools). The practice of writing and the ability to write in Innu were lost little by little over a period of several decades.

The 1970s marked a turning point in the history of writing for the Innu language. Following the 1972 publication of the document *Indian Control of Indian Education* by the National Indian Brotherhood, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs set in motion the "Project for the Amerindianization of the Aboriginal Schools," which had as one of its goals to establish the teaching of Amerindian languages in the schools.

The introduction of the Innu language into the school system posed the problem of developing a spelling norm in order to teach reading and writing in Innu. Without doubt, specialists supported the idea of establishing an orthography that could be used by all speakers, whatever their dialect. There was even consideration given within the Amerindianization project of Indian and Northern Affairs to a pan-Algonquian orthography that would use the same grapheme-phoneme correspondences for all the Algonquian languages. However, the proposal "put forward by linguists in the employ of the Department" was "met with a predictable resistance" and was "submerged in the politics of decentralization to communities which has continued from the 1970s to today" (Drapeau, 1992, p.189, 212; our translation). Even if this pan-Algonquian orthography project could have been justified on objective grounds, it did not take into account traditions, established habits, questions of identity, and so forth, all of which explain its rejection.

The work of standardizing Innu writing began in 1974, as recounted by Mailhot, an ethnolinguist who has worked with the Innu for a long time:

> Through the Amerindianization of the Schools Project, Montagnais orthographic reform has progressed through several stages since 1974: comparative description of the different local and regional dialect variants, analysis of historic and present orthographic practices, and the preparation of a proposed standard orthography worked out in collaboration with student teachers. During the next stage, most of the communities were visited and the main points of the reform tested on unilingual adults for acceptability. (Mailhot, 1985, p. 23)

An Innu-French lexicon (Mailhot & Lescop) using this orthography was published in 1977. But this first effort at standardizing the spelling system failed; speakers were not yet ready to let go of the writing system of markers for their (particular) dialect, and they categorically rejected a system that did not closely match their pronunciation. As the previous quotation from Hinton shows, writing, even for a society with an oral tradition, can be a marker of identity. "Each community, has a death grip on its particular features, and therefore, sees in *its* writing the reflection of its identity and, in the idea of uniformity a strategy for undermining *its accent*" (Drapeau, 1985b, p. 98; our translation).

Following this failure:

> From 1976, the team of consultants in the "Project for Amerindianization" was dismantled and initiatives in this matter, and

> Amerindianization in general, devolved to each community. Since then, the Department has taken no further initiatives in the area of orthography. (Drapeau, 1985b, p. 97; our translation)

Even if the proposal for uniformity did not have the hoped-for results, it did constitute a first stage that would have repercussions in the longer term.

The paradox of orthography standardization for minority (often threatened) languages is that this process is at once both time-consuming and urgent. In fact, the survival of these languages depends on means being put in place to support them, the development of writing being one of these means. One cannot always ignore the speakers and impose decisions or choices on them that they reject or do not understand. Thus, we must take into account the fact that, for many speakers from a language with an oral tradition, the difference between oral and written language is not always clear. They are afraid that they will have to change the way they speak, that they will be forced to adopt a dialect other than their own. Mailhot (1985, p. 23) points out that, in reaction to the publication of the first Innu-French lexicon written according to a standard spelling, another lexicon was produced by one of the communities on the Lower North Shore, with the title *Eukun eshi aiamiash ninan ute X* (in English: "This is how we speak at X"). Elsewhere, the introduction of a work on zoology in a phonetic orthography emphasized that, "This book has been done at Y by the Indians of Y. It is written the way we speak at Y."

It is, therefore, very difficult to convince Innu speakers of the necessity of implementing a system of writing that will not limit the dissemination of documents produced to a community of only a few hundred people, as has always been the case. I should add that certain missionaries who speak the language fluently do not accept the idea of a common spelling system either. They have developed orthographic systems specific to the communities in which they live. These systems vary from one community to the next within the same dialect. It was not easy for specialists (linguists and language teachers) to go against the work done by these missionaries.

The people who have been most concerned and most convinced of the need to establish a writing system have been, from the beginning, the Innu language teachers who must, in addition to their job of teaching, also create pedagogical material in Innu. I cite Lynn Drapeau, a linguist who has worked with the Innu of Betsiamites for 20 years and who has participated, in her capacity as linguist, in the standardization of the Innu language:

> Native teachers are often asked to perform an impossible mission: agreeing on a writing system, learning it in a few weeks, setting up materials for reading, writing, and oral teaching, and often doing all of this while they are teaching a full load. What other teachers in Canada are asked to perform such a formidable task? (Drapeau, 1985a, p. 28)

She adds that after the failure of the first efforts at orthographic standardization:

> The fact that there was no open agreement on this subject led to considerable confusion and almost total paralysis in the area of curriculum material development. Knowing that their spelling system was highly inconsistent, teachers were discouraged at the thought of producing reading materials since they knew that one day, perhaps in the near future, they would have to change most of it. The disparity of spelling habits among the teachers naturally caused a great deal of confusion among the pupils, who came to believe that Montagnais classes were futile or at least not serious. Indeed, one must remember that any students, taught to read and write in a European language with a rigorous orthography, develop high expectations about the nature of the writing system, whether it is their own language or a second language. Continuous groping and frequent disparities in spelling habits on the part of the teachers are readily noticed by students and entail considerable disillusionment. (Drapeau, 1985a, p. 27)

During the following decade, the teaching of writing in Innu made little progress due to the lack of pedagogical materials and reference works. In the absence of a spelling norm, material produced in one location could not be used elsewhere, unless adapted to the local dialect. The scarcity of human and material resources was strongly linked to the fact that each community had to recreate in some way what was done elsewhere. In such a situation, it is easy to understand that, in spite of the efforts of Innu teachers, the use of the Innu language within the school has not made much progress.

The Role of the Community of Betsiamites

Then, in Betsiamites, in the early 1980s, the process began again. In 1981, this community took control of its local school system. Wishing to be in the forefront with the Amerindianization of their schools, the authorities created a committee in 1982,

> whose task was to agree once and for all on a writing system and to set up a coherent program for teaching Montagnais as a first language from kindergarten to the eleventh grade. This committee was made up of three language teachers, a pedagogical consultant, the school principal, and a linguist. Meanwhile, the same team of teachers were working, with the help of the linguist, to design teaching materials. (Drapeau, 1985a, p. 28)

In less than a year, the committee arrived at a consensus on the orthography used in Betsiamites. The fairly conservative system that was adopted closely resembled the one that had been rejected in 1974. This is even more surprising when we know that the Betsiamites dialect is the *least* conservative of all. In fact, the committee went further in adopting a conservative spelling norm that reflected the type of language spoken 100 to 150 years earlier. The members of

the committee believed that the system could be easily adopted by the other communities. In the eyes of the Innu, the old language is often seen as a purer, and thus a more prestigious, form. It was, therefore, easier to have such a spelling system accepted, even if it was further from the spoken form and required a longer period of training to learn.

The committee insisted on the distinction between speech and writing:

> It was made clear that the new system of writing does not constitute a new linguistic standard to which one must conform in speaking. On the contrary, we insist that readers actually pronounce the word in their own vernacular dialect. Every effort is made in this respect so that students learn to read with no trace of a "foreign" accent. This is a major issue since we must avoid the possible accusation of trying to change the Betsiamites dialect by having the children speak the way they do in some other village. (Drapeau, 1985a, p. 31)

At no time during the process of standardization was there any question of a *spoken standard*. In all training given to future teachers of the Innu language, there was an insistence on the importance of respecting, in speech, the student's dialect, as is the case elsewhere in French or in English, where speakers keep their accent, even when the spelling is standardized.

After having succeeded with its own standardization, the Amerindianization committee at Betsiamites held a conference in 1983 that brought together Innu language teachers from all communities to discuss the orthography. This initiative was the beginning of a serious effort that would lead to standardization.

Continuing the Process: The Intervention of ICEM

The rest of the process took place in stages. In 1985, José Mailhot, who had participated since the beginning in the work of developing Innu writing, wrote:

> Acceptance by the population of the principle of a standard spelling system is only one factor needed for successful Montagnais orthographic reform. Such a change clearly will only be adopted through effective means of implementation. But no one has either the mandate or the power to ensure that the new orthography is used for real activities in Montagnais literacy. There is no policy on the question and no organization to formulate one and to see to its application. Here, as in other areas, everything takes place at the local level and everything is left to individual initiative. (Mailhot, 1985, p. 23)

On the subject of Innu publications, she adds:

> There exists no mechanism for consultation among the various community members who are writing texts for publication. An orthographic norm will not be accepted by the population if it has not

> first been adopted by the writers themselves because publication constitutes its surest means of dissemination. Responsibility for orthographic practice, however, should not rest exclusively with authors. (Mailhot, 1985, p. 24)

The absence of an authority (or an organization) with a mandate to further the development and dissemination of the Innu spelling norm seems to have blocked and slowed down the standardization process. This problem is pointed out by many authors who have witnessed the same situation. In the case of the Innu language, the large number of politically autonomous communities and the diversity of dialects could not give reliable results without some centralization of efforts. Let me point out that each Innu community is managed locally by a Band Council and that the schools are also administrated locally.

Towards the mid 1980s, an important step forward was taken with the arrival of a new partner to take over leadership in the standardization of the spelling system, l'Institut culturel et éducatif montagnais (ICEM), in English, the Montagnais Institute for Culture and Education. This cultural and educational organization, which worked with most of the Innu communities, was given as its mandate in the fall of 1985 the promotion of orthography standardization. Its role was to identify and make available human and material resources through funding future publications that followed the spelling norms, wherever such norms existed. The entry of the Institute responded to the wishes of those who deplored the absence of leadership and clear policies on this question.

The means put in place by ICEM have produced interesting results. For example, in 1989 a first spelling guide was produced that contained proposed solutions to the main problems that had been identified. Lynn Drapeau, one of the specialists involved in this matter, describes the stages that took place:

> First, Lynn Drapeau and José Mailhot analyzed recent Montagnais language publications from all the communities with the aim of establishing a first set of criteria. Variation was found on many points, some reflecting dialectal differences while other being a matter of pure convention. Each point of variation was noted, analyzed linguistically and put on a working document, which was then considered during three workshops of 3 days each from March 1986 to February 1989. These workshops brought together teachers and translators from all the communities. Because of the marked differences that separated the western dialects (Betsiamites, Sept-Iles and Schefferville) from those of the Lower North Shore, it was not possible to eliminate these spelling differences. Nevertheless the orthography was largely standardized and the rest of the process could be left to time. The decisions made in the workshops were recorded in a practical guide for teachers and editors of Montagnais texts. (Drapeau, 1992, p. 197; our translation)

In the wake of the work launched by the workshops, a Montagnais-French dictionary was published in 1991. Putting into practice the solutions proposed during the workshops, it now serves as a reference manual for the spelling of vocabulary. It must be noted that a rigorous process was followed in the editing of this dictionary in order to determine the correct spelling; to this end, many dictionaries were consulted, including those from the seventeenth century, and this allowed the historical forms of the roots to be used in disputed cases.

As Drapeau (1992) noted, the workshops organized by the Institute (ICEM) did not lead to the settling of all dialect variations. Most unresolved cases had to do with the spelling of grammatical forms (morphological variants). Nevertheless, the spelling differences had been reduced to two variants: that of the eastern dialect (grouping four communities from the Lower North Shore and the community of Sheshatshiu, in Labrador) and that of the western dialect (Betsiamites, Uashat-Maliotenam, and Schefferville).

The community of Mashteuiatsh (Lac St-Jean) withdrew at a certain point in the standardization process because it was in a different situation. There, only one third of the population still speaks the Innu language, and the average age of speakers is rather high. The language, therefore, needs to be taught as a second language. The choice of a more abstract spelling system, that is, one that does not match the pronunciation very closely, poses certain problems to second language learning. In addition, Mashteuiatsh is a distinct dialect, even though it shares a number of features with Betsiamites. However, contact has not been cut off between this community and the others; language teachers from Mashteuiatsh keep a close eye on the progress of standardization.

The Kaianuet Committee

In 1990, ICEM created the Kaianuet Committee, bringing together representatives from each community, particularly Innu language teachers. Meeting three times a year, the Committee looks after the promotion and development of the Innu language. Decisions pertaining to standardization of the spelling are now part of its mandate.

It is important to understand that the establishment of an orthographic system is a complex process that should be directed by people who have a good knowledge of the language, of its grammatical structures, and of its rules. Most members of the Kaianuet committee have had many years of experience in teaching, which has convinced them of the necessity of a good spelling system. Because their theoretical knowledge of the language is less solid, they consult specialists when they feel the need.

The committee has played an important role in the later process of standardization. The fact that the committee is permanent has guaranteed continuity since its establishment.

Final Stage

As I noted previously, the workshops that were completed in 1989 did not solve all the problems of dialect variation, especially those linked to the spelling

of grammatical variants. In 1997, a post-secondary program in Innu language and culture was set up in Sept-Iles. Because this program draws Innu from all regions of Quebec and has an important linguistic component, the question of standardizing the spelling arose once again. In the communities, language-teaching programs had only local participants; thus, the status quo orthography was satisfactory, even if there were problems with it. But when representatives from all dialects were working together, a norm had to be established once and for all.

Another series of workshops on spelling were then organized from March through May 1997 at Sept-Iles. In the second workshop, the focus was placed on verb conjugations, a crucial question in Innu. In this language, as in so many Algonquian languages, and probably most Amerindian languages, the verbal system is extremely complex. In addition, in Innu, there are significant differences between the east and the west for a certain number of verbal inflections. For a long time, it seemed that these differences could not be resolved.

The work was arduous, but the results obtained from the workshops were positive; a consensus was reached that allowed for the establishment of principles and rules for a common writing system that could be used by all Innu. The few remaining minor points of variation are not obstacles to standardizing the texts. In any case, as José Mailhot stated in the document that outlines the synthesis of the 1997 workshops: "Let us remember that the standardization of the orthography of the Innu language is a process to be continued into future years" (Mailhot, 1997, p. 2; our translation).

Among the many recommendations from the workshops is this one: "If they are aimed at the Innu public, any new books which will be published by ICEM, as well as older ones which will be re-edited, should—with the permission of the author—conform to Innu spelling" (Mailhot, 1997, p. 8; our translation).

A reference grammar of the Innu language is also in the process of being published; this work will be useful for establishing the grammatical spelling rules. Until the grammar is published, a guide to verb conjugations has been produced from the material to be included in the grammar.

Cases That Are Difficult to Settle

I have now finished the history of the different stages that led to the standardization of the Innu orthography. In order to understand why this process has been so long and difficult, we should perhaps examine several concrete problems with which those working on the standardization had to deal. I will look at three of these.

The question of vowel length. In Innu, there are two sets of vowels: long and short. Historically, the Innu have never marked the long vowels, as is done in other related Algonquian languages. From the beginning of the process of spelling standardization, those involved refused to mark vowel length, contrary to the wishes of linguists who would have liked to be able to identify this feature. This decision was irrevocable. Thus, even though Mailhot and Lescop's 1977 *Lexique montagnais-français* did mark the long vowels, Drapeau's 1991

dictionary gave no indication of vowel length in the standard spelling. It did, however, mark length in the phonetic transcription.

Linguists were worried that not marking vowel length would make reading more difficult. MacKenzie (1985, p. 55) mentions that she had the same concerns with the orthography of James Bay Cree (East Cree), but that, over time, she realized that it was not really necessary to indicate vowel length for speakers.

In addition, it was quickly realized that, for the Innu language, marking vowel length would pose a major problem for standardization. There is variation between the eastern and western dialects as a result of historical changes: vowels that are long in the eastern dialect are short in the western one. If there had been a decision made to write vowel length, it would have been difficult to standardize.

The pronunciation of vowels. This had been an even thornier problem. There were originally seven vowels in Innu: four long and three short. The evolution of the language has been such that, today, only the eastern dialect has kept this seven vowel system; in the western dialect, two short vowels, *i* and *a*, have merged and are now pronounced [ə]. Besides that, the short vowels have a tendency not to be pronounced at all at the beginning and end of words.

The solution that was adopted was to write the vowels in the most conservative way. To do this, either the vowels of the eastern dialect or the forms from old Innu were used as points of reference. This solution requires training on the part of speakers, who now cannot trust their own pronunciation in order to know how to write words.

The n/l variation. The consonant *l* exists only in the sub-dialects of the west: Mashteuiatsh and Betsiamites. Elsewhere, *n* is used. The consonant *n* is also present in both sub-dialects. The word *Innu* illustrates this situation well. It is pronounced *ilnu* at Betsiamites and at Mashteuiatsh and *innu* elsewhere. It is impossible for those speakers who do not use *l* to know when to write it. It was, therefore, proposed very early on that *l* never be used in the standard orthography. This was an easy solution to apply. It was, however, difficult for the people of Betsiamites to accept; the *l* has become a mark of identity for them. It was only in the final stage of the process of standardizing the spelling that the representatives from Betsiamites accepted not writing their *l* any more. This consonant is found, however, in the Drapeau dictionary, which was published before this decision was accepted by the people of Betsiamites.

The aim of this paper is not to describe in detail the dialect differences of the Innu language and the spelling decisions that were adopted. This information can be found elsewhere (Drapeau & Mailhot, 1989; Mailhot, 1997). Instead, I wish to focus on the principles that allowed an orthographic standard to arise.

The Principles of Innu Orthography

These principles, which were decided on during the course of different spelling workshops, are presented in the document entitled, l*Pour une orthographe unique de la langue innue* (*Towards a common spelling system for the Innu language*):

- Thè Innu orthography will be based on a set of rules that will be called "the rules of written Innu."
- The local features of the spoken language will not be represented in the written system.
- For spelling of vocabulary, the *Dictionnaire montagnais-français* by L. Drapeau will serve as a reference (but with systematic changes and certain corrections).
- For the spelling of grammatical forms, the eastern dialect will be used as a reference (but the verb conjugations and other paradigms will be regularized).
- Variations in vocabulary that exist at the local or regional level will be treated as synonyms.
- The particular phrasing and style of each author will be respected. (Mailhot, 1997, p. 6; our translation)

Principle 3 presents the 1991 Drapeau dictionary as the reference work for standard spellings. It must be kept in mind, however, that this dictionary was made for the Betsiamites dialect before the end of the standardization process. This is why adjustments are necessary. In response to these necessary adjustments, a supplement to the dictionary was produced in a cheap format by the Kaianuet committee to meet the immediate needs of users. This supplement can be enlarged and published if necessary before another edition of the Dictionary is brought out. Another possible solution would be to transfer the dictionary to CD-ROM with the necessary additions and corrections, but this will not happen in the short-term.

Principle 4 underlines the fact that the eastern dialect (which consists of speakers from the Lower North Shore and Sheshatshiu) will serve as a reference for grammatical spelling because this dialect is the most conservative and retains grammatical markers that are often lost in the western dialect. Other reference works will be the *Guide de conjugaisons en langue innue* (Baraby, 1999), already available, and the *Grammaire de la langue innue* (Baraby & Drapeau, forthcoming), a chapter of which is already in circulation as a working document.

As for Principle 5, it treats the question of the coexistence of regional vocabulary items, like any other language. Thus, an author from the western dialect will use the verb *papu* "to laugh" while one from the east will use *ushinamu*. A list of such synonyms is presented in Mailhot (1997, p. 27) and some of these words are found in the supplement.

Finally, the new Innu spelling norm does not correspond to any particular dialect, but it is, in some way, a fusion of the characteristics of two current dialects. The choice of spelling rules was made in a rigorous fashion according to the principles that I have just outlined. Cases that were difficult to resolve were carefully examined and the resulting solutions accepted by all workshop participants, who represented the communities. The solutions that were adopted in the course of the 1997 workshops were those that provoked the most resistance in the beginning or that had not been previously studied (for example, verb endings).

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Standard Orthography

It must be understood that, if the provision of a uniform spelling has advantages, it also has disadvantages. If it were not so, it would not have taken so long to arrive at a written system accepted by all Innu.

The spelling orthography is more difficult for eastern speakers to apply, while for those from the west, the grammatical rules require greater effort. Mailhot (1997) listed the main points of disadvantage for spelling reform:

- reform requires the adoption of a number of changes in the existing spelling of all users
- in all dialects, the written language will be very far from the spoken language (so that no one will be able to count on his or her pronunciation as a guide to spelling)
- training in the written system will be longer and more difficult than it is now; the proposed reform does not take account of the language of Mashteuiatsh
- all the words in the Innu language are not in the dictionary; certain minor points still have no solution. (p. 7; our translation)

Future

This spelling norm is still very recent; the work is far from over. Above all, the norm must be disseminated to other speakers, and this is a long way from happening. The focus should be on the training of different groups who will use it: teachers, editors, translators, and so forth. These groups are generally in favour of spelling reform because they understand the need, but, without training, they encounter difficulties in applying the rules.

At the moment, too few Innu have mastered the common orthography sufficiently. Feeling ill at ease with this new norm, they are often hesitant to adopt it. The important work of creating awareness and promoting the spelling norm needs to be carried out for the whole population. We should not have set our expectations too high, however, because it is not easy to make people understand the results of standardization when they have not followed all the steps in the process.

It is necessary to target young people in particular. As experience has shown, right from the beginning of the orthographic standardization process, children have much less difficulty than adults do in mastering a spelling system that does not wholly correspond to pronunciation. In fact, they have no prejudices, have not acquired spelling habits (as have adults), and are not attached to any particular tradition, such as the one inherited from the missionaries. Objectively, the Innu standard orthography is not more abstract or complex than that of French or English. It is the lack of teaching material and written documents that makes the difference, as much as the scarcity of well-trained teaching personnel for written Innu. If the teaching of the Innu language is given more room in the school curriculum, then the dissemination of the common spelling system can move forward.

In future years, the focus will be placed on children and adult literacy, on producing language specialists, and on the production of pedagogical and reference material.

Conclusion

In recounting the history of the standardization of the Innu orthography, I have shared with you an experience of spelling standardization that was not easy but that has given interesting results, thanks to the ceaseless work of individuals who really believed and persevered. In some locations, people who were present at the beginning of the process continue to work in the same direction as teachers, translators, program co-ordinators, members of the Kaianuet Committee, and so forth. The existence of a spelling standard does not guarantee the survival of a minority language from an oral tradition, but it is an important tool in the development of writing that may help language maintenance.

Perhaps this experience will encourage those who are engaged in a similar process to persevere despite the obstacles.

Note

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